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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Arab NGO Network for Development, non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 February 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Deterioration of civil and political rights in Bahrain continues

From the last session of the Human Rights Council in September 2014, to the current 28th session, Bahrain witnessed further erosion of human rights and deterioration of civil society space and violation of Bahrain's human rights commitments and obligations in terms of freedom of expression and political practices.

For instance, the largest political and opposition party, Alwefaq which secured 62% of votes in the parliamentary elections of 2010, with 18 MPs out of 40 MPs of the House of Representative, has been denied repeatedly to hold its Conference and its political figures have been targeted. First Deputy Secretary General , Mr. Khalil Almarzooq, was arrested and charged with holding the flag of an illegitimate organization (Coalition of 14 February Youth), and propagating hatred against the state. He was held for a month in detention, and exposed to strenuous interrogation, prior to appearing before Minor Court, which released him on bail, but the prosecution was not dropped. The Head of Alwefaq Shura Council, Sayed Jamil Kadem, was also accused of tweeting information that adversely influence the election. The Secretary General, Sh. Ali Salman, was summoned to interrogation on 28 December 2014 have been interrogated repeatedly. During his trial on 28 January, the Court decided to adjourn the trial to 25.2.2015 and ordered the continued detention of Sh. Ali Salman.The other aspect of undermining legitimate political activities has been sanctioning licensed demonstrations and meeting for the last three months.

Moreover, while the recent UN resolution on civil society space[1] emphasized the problematic of domestic legal and administrative provisions, such as national security and counter-terrorism legislation, and other measures, such as provisions on funding to civil society being misused to hinder the work of civil society, such practices in Bahrain remain. This requires the Council to closely follow the situation on the ground; given that foreign funding to independent organizations is restricted, and with the latest amendments on the law on Clubs and Society, dual membership of political organization and NGO, the dual membership of sport union and NGO, the membership of NGO Board and another NGO are denied.

Freedom of peaceful assembly continue to be violated as well through quelling protests with excessive force, deadly targeting protesters, arbitrary arrests without warrants, unfair trials with disproportionate penalties. Freedom of expression including those of social media has been restricted , where tweets lead to minimum 6 months imprisonment; given the cases of human rights activists such as Mr. Nabil Rajab, Nader Abdulemam and Ms. Ghada Jamshir, who were sentenced to imprisonment.

Bahraini Government's practices against the enjoyment of legitimate political and civil rights including freedom of association, freedom of expression, and freedom of belief have been closely monitored by the OHCHR and the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon as well, where the former noted that "opposition parties are fundamental pillars of any democracy and Sheikh Salman's arrest risks intensifying the fraugnt political scene that has seen anti-government protests for nearly four years[2]."

In this context, we call the UN Human Rights Council members to urge the Government of Bahrain to cooperate with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Special Rapporteurs on Torture, Human Rights Defenders and Freedom of Association and immediately implement the recommendations put forward during the country's Universal Periodic Review in 2012, as well as by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry in 2011, to ensure freedom of expression and assembly and to immediately release of all persons convicted or detained for merely exercising their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

*Bahrain Human Rights Observatory (BHRO), NGO without consultative status also shares the views expressed in this statement.

[1] http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/27/L.24

[2] http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15461&LangID=E